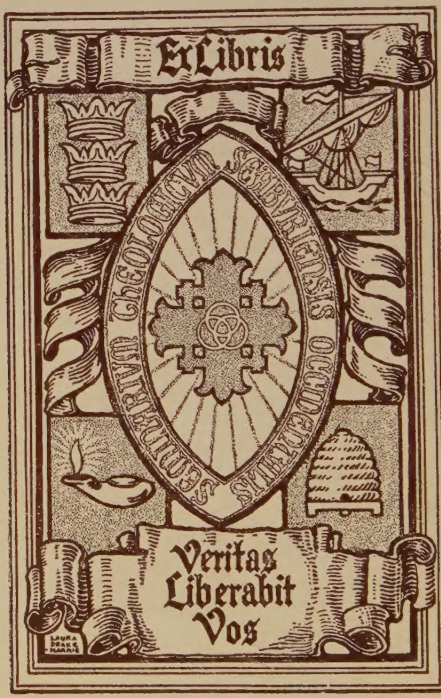
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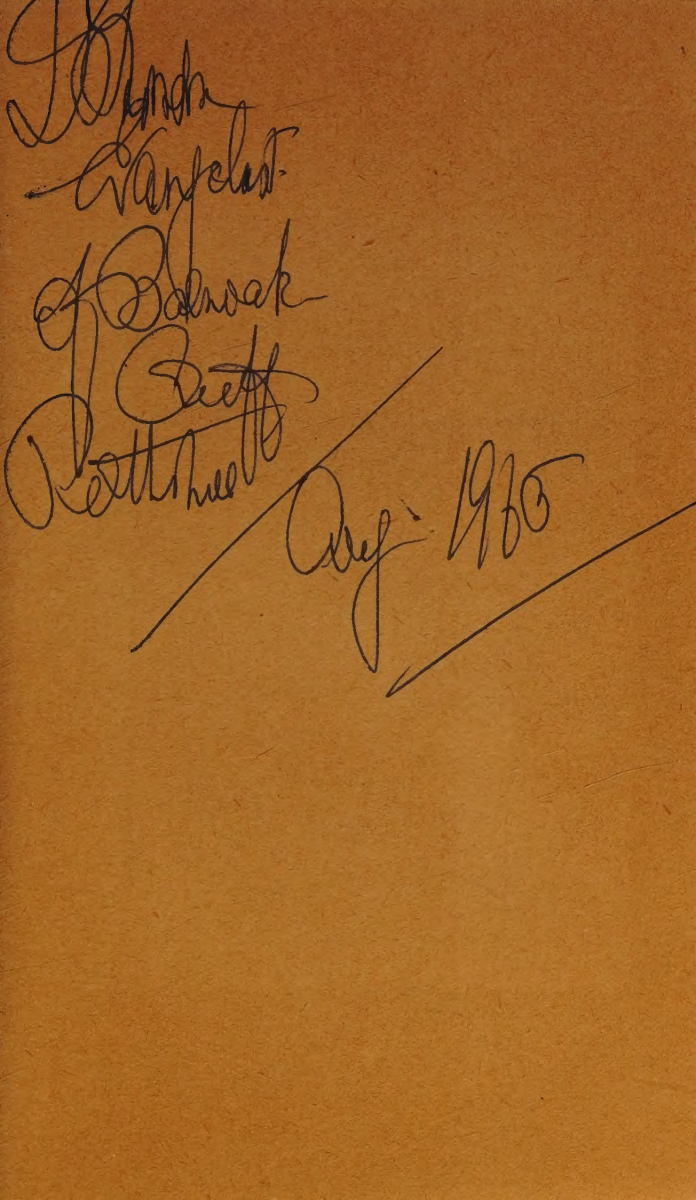
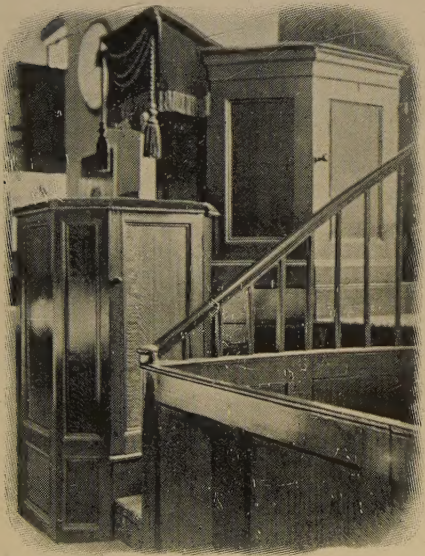


JOHN CAMPBELL (1785-1826)
IN THE TOLBOOTH CHURCH OF ST GILES, EDINBURGH
DR ALEXANDER WEBSTER PREACHING
*From Kay's Portraits, 1821 (see Note p. 10).*

Wehlock £3.00

# THE PASSING OF THE PRECENTOR

BY
DUNCAN FRASER, F.E.I.S.
*Precentor to the United Free Church General Assembly*



THE EMPTY DESK, BOSTON'S KIRK, ETTRICK *(page 122)*
*(Photographed specially for this book by Mr M'Laren, Jun.)*

GALL & INGLIS, 20 BERNARD TERRACE, EDINBURGH
*AND LONDON*
1916

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SUTS

Dedicated

BY PERMISSION

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE MARQUIS OF ABERDEEN

AND TEMAIR, K.T., ETC.

WHO TO HIS MANY DISTINGUISHED GIFTS ADDS

THAT OF A FERVENT LOVE

FOR

THE PSALMODY OF THE

SCOTTISH CHURCH

# PREFACE

ENCOURAGED by the success of the first edition of *The Passing of the Precentor*, alike with Press and public, the Author has added a chapter upon "Church Music in Scotland prior to the Reformation," and has inserted numerous extended biographical, clerical, and humorous incidents.

The Author has been moved to this work, by the conviction that the Precentor, in spite of his mannerisms, did good service in the days when musical sentiment was at its lowest, alike in pulpit and in pew: and he hopes that it may help to keep alive the memory of the old method of "Uptaking the Psalme":

for, unless something regarding the old Precentor is put on record speedily, both the man and his work will soon be forgotten.

The portraits embodied in the book form a somewhat rare and unique gallery of Precentor celebrities, and the Author tenders his warmest thanks to the friends who placed the original photographs at his disposal; particularly to Mr C. M. Lawrence, of Aberdeen, and to Mr W. Carnie's daughter, Mrs R. A. Dyer Connon, for permission to use the late Sir George Reid's portrait of her father.

DUNCAN FRASER.

EDINBURGH,
*November*, 1916.

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THE frontispiece is reproduced from Kay's "Edinburgh Portraits, 1821," and depicts the well-known non-church-goers of the day listening, in the Tolbooth Church (portion of St Giles'), Edinburgh, to Dr Alexander Webster —the most evangelical preacher of the day. As the precentor, Kay selected for his model John Campbell of the Canongate Church, a notable teacher of music in the city. Campbell was a favourite pupil of the celebrated Tenducci, who, on leaving the city, had Campbell's portrait engraved and presented to his circle of patrons, thus establishing Campbell, without his knowledge, as his successor. He was for twenty-five years precentor in the Canongate Church, and Burns was a frequent guest at his table: It was through Campbell that Burns secured permission for the erection of the tombstone to Robert Fergusson the poet.

# PORTRAITS

JOHN CAMPBELL, Precentor of the Canongate Church in St Giles' (*after* Kay), 1785–1826. *Frontispiece*

THE DESK, BOSTON'S CHURCH, ETTRICK *Vignette on Title*

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# PART I

# Church Music in Scotland Prior to the Reformation

THOSE interested in the history of national music must have been impressed with the fact that the currents of song, however diverse their tributaries may be, have gradually come to flow in two great streams—the one having its source in simple folk-song and chanted ballad; the other having its origin in the cloister, and drawing its sustenance from the Church's ritual.

There is no period in the history of Scotland where we do not find poetry and

song entering largely into the thought and life of the people; so much is this the case, that we have come to ascribe to the Scots the credit of inventing, or, at least, of evolving from simple elements, a singularly attractive form of melody, fascinating and unique even amongst the national songs of cultured Europe.

In the early periods of Scotland's history, the people were dependent upon themselves for their music and their song. Scotsmen did the deeds which Scotsmen told and sang; and the configuration of the land, which limited their interest to a little part of the earth's surface, led but to a greater intensity of feeling, and fervour of expression.

That this innate musical faculty did not enter more into Church life than it

did, was not the fault of the people, but of the Church rulers.

In Apostolic times, and in the earlier centuries of the Christian era, Church praise was an act of worship common to people and clergy alike; but after the fourth century, a stricter ritual was enforced, and the Council of Laodicea instituted the order of singing Canons—an order which by and by superseded the people entirely, and deprived them of the privilege of song in worship.

That low views on Church song had corrupted the service, all students of Church history know, and the efforts of St Ambrose and St Gregory to elevate and purify the music of their time, merits full acknowledgment. But the fact remains that the people of Europe, and especially the people of Scotland,

being deprived of all participation in the Church's service, could not be denied the solace and sustenance which audible song is fitted to give; so they sought for, and found, an outflow to their musical sentiments in the songs and ballads sung to them by the minstrels of the Middle Ages.

It is interesting to observe, that the streams of so-called sacred and secular song frequently converged, the people sometimes appropriating the chant of the Church to set off the narrative of the rhymer, while the skilful Church musician found in the melody of the harper, something worthy of adoption, even in his setting of the Mass.

At no time was there a greater convergence of people's song with Church song than during the fourteenth and fifteenth

centuries, and Naumann, in his *History of Music*, speaking of this, says:

"This appropriation of popular folk-songs by sacred composers points to a fact, the important significance of which cannot be too highly estimated; it demonstrates, in our opinion, the natural perfection which the people had attained in making their own music, and the artificiality of the master's compositions, the result of a too strict adherence to the academical law."

There has long existed an erroneous impression that Church music in Scotland was a plant of very slender growth prior to the Reformation period, but recent research into the vast stores of records relating to mediæval times in the national depositories in Edinburgh alone, has brought to light much that is invaluable on this subject.

In a recent report of the Scottish Text Society it is said :

" Miss Borland, daughter of a minister of the Church of Scotland, had recently been engaged in framing a catalogue of the magnificent manuscript preserved in the Edinburgh University Library, and that she had been the means of bringing to light a number of historical documents of the utmost importance. Among these were an early Celtic Psalter with the Celtic Division of the Psalms, and dated either in the eleventh or twelfth century. It bore the inscription in a sixteenth-century hand, ' Liber magistri Johannis Reyd, Cancellarij Aberdonensis,' and was, therefore, probably of Scottish origin. It was to be remembered that there was no document in Scotland at the present moment of Scottish hand-

writing, written prior to the year 1100; (2) a very important fragment of a fourteenth-century Antiphoner containing part of the service for St Columba's day, with the ecclesiastical plain chant or Gregorian music. This was the earliest piece of music known to have been written in Scotland; (3) Collection of Theological Treatises belonging to Sweetheart Abbey, with a leaf of a noted Breviary for York Use of the thirteenth century; (4) Sarum Breviary written about A.D. 1300 for use in England, and afterwards used in Scotland; (5) Noted Breviary for Sarum Use written about the year 1300 for use in England, but afterwards used in Aberdeen. To this portions of a Charnich similar to that of Melrose had been added in a fourteenth-century hand, and, in a later, part of the service for St Kentigern;

(6), Book containing five choir parts of sixteenth-century harmonised music for the ordinary Mass and certain anthems, etc., etc. . . ."

In Grant's *History of the Burgh Schools of Scotland*, some sidelights are thrown upon this question of early attention to music in Scotland, that are invaluable. Thus :

" Besides the Grammar School, and lecture, or English school, there was another class of schools before the Reformation, namely the Sang School. At first, perhaps, it existed only in cathedrals and cathedral towns, for the education of boys intended for the choir, but long before the Reformation we meet with it, not only in the seats of the great abbeys such as Jedburgh or Dunfermline, but in almost all the leading burghs of Scotland. . . ."

In a book on *Scottish Education*, by Dr John Kerr, lately H.M. Chief Inspector of Schools, the following remarks occur opportune to this subject :—

"One of the earliest sang schools of which there is any record, is that of Aberdeen, about the middle of the thirteenth century. The importance attached to the sang school is shown by its being provided by statute that on all greater feasts, there shall attend four singing boys—two for carrying the tapers, and two for incense—who will be present at matins and great mass."

"As this sang school was intended only for the choir, nothing else was taught in it but 'music,' 'meaners,' and 'vertue.'

Dr Kerr continues :—

"We find, however, that in the fifteenth

and sixteenth centuries, such schools were found in connection with abbeys, and in almost all large burghs, that in addition to music, English, arithmetic, and writing were also taught, and that the instruction was not confined to the choristers."

"The Aberdeen school had a high reputation. The Master was appointed for life, and all the expenses of the school were met by the magistrates. The salary of the Master was upwards of 20 merks, Scots, annually. The choristers were sometimes of the poorer class. In 1541, the Aberdeen Council ordered 40 shillings to be paid to each of the two boys in the sang school, to help to buy them clothes. . . ."

There is another city which gives us some light upon the question of music-

teaching, for we find from the Records of Edinburgh for 1532 that the Treasurer of the City pays to the Master of the Sang Scule the sum of £10 sterling.

This is a larger sum than that usually given, but by this time the practice had begun of admitting pupils outside of those in ecclesiastical circles, for whom, as we have seen, the Sang Scule was originally intended.

The musical sentiment in the Scots was deeply stirred by the events which preceded and followed the Reformation. This stupendous event itself was the outcome of an accession of new thought, and new discoveries in art and science that considerably enlarged the intellectual horizon of humanity.

It is to Huss, Luther, Calvin, and Knox, that we are indebted for the

prominence which was given to the art of music in this great revolution.

Never was there a greater mistake than to suppose—as has too often been done—that either the leaders or the people of these times were indifferent or antagonistic to the fine arts. Luther spoke for them all when he said: "I am not of opinion that the teachings of the Gospel tend to check the growth of art, as some deluded clericals pretend. It is my belief that all arts, especially music, might advantageously be used in the service of Him who created them."

The Reformation in Scotland was carried forward upon a flood of song, and a very thoughtful vindication of the people from the charge of being indifferent to music and the fine arts at this critical period of their national history, is to be

found in Spencer Curwen's remarks upon Scottish Presbyterian Psalmody in his book on *Worship Music,* where he says:

"The key to historical study is sympathy. To understand the Reformation in Scotland as it affected Church music, we must enter into the spirit of the times. The spiritual force of the Scottish Reformation sprang from a new conception of worship which swept aside the adjunct of art and beauty which had been employed in the Romish Church, as superfluous and impertinent. . . ."

"This Reformation was not a reaction against art; it was a movement towards spirituality of worship that found art unnecessary for its end."

Congregational praise was one of the subjects which called for the early con-

sideration of the General Assembly of the Reformed Church of Scotland. The version of the Psalms first adopted was that of Sternhold and Hopkins, with the Geneva additions, and so far from being inclined to restrict themselves to these, we learn from some notes which Dr David Laing appended to Principal Baillie's *Letters and Journals* that the General Assembly contemplated the rendering of other parts of Scripture into metre as well as the Psalms of David.

Knox's Liturgy did much to focus public attention upon the importance of praise in worship. For instance, we find such directions as the following:—

"And so, efter the rehersall of the belief, efter the quhilk sall be sung this portion of the 103 psalme, v. 19., "The hevins

hie are made the seat,"—and so forth to the end of that psalme."

In the *Buke of Discipline*, also, there are certain directions given regarding the singing, such as:—

"Moreover, men, women, and children wald be exhorted to exercise themselvis in the psalmes, that when the Church convenith, and dois sing, thai may be more abill together with common heart and voice to prayse God."

It is quite a mistake to suppose that Scotland was indebted to foreigners for her Church music. In Dr M'Crie's *Life of Melville* we read:

"The regliousons [novitiates] of the Priory of St Andrews were always celebrated for their skill in music. Singing formed one of the regular exercises of the student, and individuals who had

belonged to the Priory were employed in composing the music used in the Churches after the Reformation."

James Melville, the nephew of the famous Andrew, has a quaint reference to music in his diary:

"Mairover, in these years I learnt my music, wherein I took graitar delight, of ane Alexander Smith, wha had been trained up among the monks of the Abbey. I learnt of him the gam [gamut or scale], plain-song, and mony of the treblis of the psalmes, whereof some I could weel sing in the kirk; but my naturalitie and easy learning by the ear maid me mair unsolid and unready to use the form of the art."

Scotland at this time was far from being either narrow or morose, far we gather from contemporary sources that

military exercises, athletic games, archery, and music, were commonly studied and practised by all classes; and, as the historian quaintly adds, "even by the gravest ministers."

Music having such a prominent place in Scottish life, it is not surprising to find that the psalms were translated in a great variety of metres, and that in some books the music of every psalm was printed under the first verse, so that everyone who had a psalm-book had also a book of psalm tunes.

Great pains were taken to instruct the people in psalmody, and men, women, and even children, are frequently exhorted to exercise themselves in the practice thereof. This they did so thoroughly that we have frequent instances recorded of a large concourse of people bursting into

song when anything stirred them deeply.

It is evident from the foregoing and other accounts that music, so far from being in a neglected or backward condition in Scotland during, and prior to, the sixteenth century, was in a vigorous, even an advanced, state; and we naturally expect to find a greater expansion of the accessories of praise in the Reformed Church as the years roll on.

Who, or what, did hinder it? The chapters that follow will throw some light on the question.

PART II

# The Uptaker of the Psalme

THE passing of the Scottish precentor, view it how we may, is not without an element of pathos: it affects one like the removal of an ancient landmark, or "the end of an auld sang," as was said of the Union of the Crowns. And such things appeal to the Scottish nature; for, alongside of his sterner characteristics, there has ever lain a vein of sentiment in the Scot, like the red thread that is spun into the thickest rope of the Royal Navy.

## THE UPTAKER OF THE PSALME

Before viewing the precentor under the lights and shadows which our arrangement of the subject may cast upon him, it is necessary that we should first glance briefly at the office and the officiál as they are to be seen at the time of their first institution.

### ORDER OF THE SERVICE

In the Presbyterian Church of Scotland at, and for many years after the Reformation, public worship was divided into two parts.

The first part consisted of Reading, Praise and Prayer ; and the end of each of these exercises was intimated by the ringing of the kirk bell.

It was not until after the third bell that the minister ascended the pulpit and the sermon began.

## THE UPTAKER OF THE PSALME

In Knox's *Directory of Public Worship* we can only find mention made of two places where a psalm was to be sung; but when we remember that singing occupied one-third of the time given to the first part of the service, it can easily be seen that music occupied an important place in the early Church worship.

The name given to the leader of the singing in public worship at this time was that of "*Uptaker of the Psalme.*" This office was conjoined in many instances with that of the "*Reader,*" and in others with that of the teacher of the "Sang Scule"[1]—a very important institution in Scotland in those days.

[1] Sir Edward Henderson was the Master of the Sang Scule of Edinburgh at the time of the Reformation, having been appointed in 1553 by the Town Council.

From a record of the "Burgh of Canongate, Edinburgh," 1584, we see how the offices were often conjoined.

"The quhilk day the bailies and counsall has appointed and agreeit with Walter Broune to serve in the kirk in reading the prayers, Uptaking of the Psalmes, and serve as ane Clerk in the Sessioune."

In the *Second Book of Discipline*, 1581, the "Takers up of Psalmes" are twice mentioned in the list of classes entitled to receive a share of the revenues of the Kirk. That this share was not burdensome can be gathered by reference to many Town Council or Kirk-Session Records. Thus:

Aberdeen Burgh, 1577. "The said day, the counsell grantid the sum of

four pundis to the support of James Symsoune, doctour of their Sang Scuill —to help to by him clothis, for his guid service the tym bygane, and in houp of his continuance in tym to com."

Or Glasgow Kirk-Session Records for 1604:

". . . He that taks up the line in the High Kirk to get 20 merks quarterly."

(A merk was 13s. 4d. Scots, or 13⅓d. of the present day.)

Also from the same Records:—

"A sark and a bonnet, and afterwards a coat, to be bought to him that carries up the line in the High Kirk."

Stirling, 1621. "The quhilk day the bretherin of the kirk, at desyir of the Magistrates and Councell, consentis to give David Murray, Musitioner, for

uptaking of the psalme in the kirk and teaching of ane musick school in this toun, xx merk yearly during his service."

Extracts like the foregoing are to be met with in abundance in Dr Livingston's beautiful reprint of the 1635 Scottish Psalter, to which we would refer anyone interested in a far-off view of the monetary value of an "Uptaker of the Psalmes" in the early Church of the Reformation.

The first time that we find the term "Precentor" applied to the leader of psalmody in the Scottish Church is in a Minute of the Glasgow Kirk-Session of 1653, which says:

"To the precentor a quarter's salary of 26 pounds, 13 shillings, and four pence: and to a year's precenting in the outer kirk, 40 pounds."

As a pound Scots is of the value of 1s. 8d. sterling at present, there was little chance of the precentor becoming purse-proud.

The ecclesiastical term "precentor" doubtless came from England. It is derived from two Latin words: *præ*, before; *cantor*, a singer. The term "Clerk" seems to have made a raid across the Borders about the same time, and has been found in one or two instances applied to the Uptaker of the Psalme. A more sonorous title, as in St Giles, Edinburgh, and Dunfermline Abbey to this day, is that of "Master of Song."

As early as 1587 there is to be seen an entry in the Glasgow Kirk-Session Records which looks somewhat like the beginning of the Presbyterian Kirk "baand." Thus:

"Ordean Mr William Struthers, Teacher of Music, shall sing in the High Kirk from the ringing of the first bell, to the minister's coming in; and appoint four men to sit beside him, beneath the pulpit."

In the year following there is another Minute:

"That the sangsters in toun sing with Mr William Struthers on Sunday."

These sangsters were assistants, or district teachers of music in connection with the Sang Scule.

There is a greater advance towards the development of the "band" to be seen in a Record of the Stirling Kirk-Session of 1621. An alteration of the pulpit and the Reader's lectern had been agreed to, and the Town Council direct those in charge of the work to see:—

"That they mak commodious seattis about the fit thereof, meit for the maister of the Sang Scule and his bairns to sit on, for the singing of the psalmes in the tyme of the holie service of the Kirk."

In a Minute of the "General Kirk of Edinburgh" of 1574 we get a glimpse of one of those little family tiffs that sometimes arose between Kirk-Sessions and the Uptaker of the Psalme.

"The Kirk ordanis Edward Hendersoune and his sonne, to sing the psalmes on the preaching days in sic touns as are maist column (*sic*) for the Kirk."

Later on we meet with another instance:

"Edinburgh, 1619. Mr Patrick Henrisone, reader, being summoned,

compeered before the Hie Commission. He was accused for absenting himself from his owne place on Christmas day, and placing another in his roume to tak up the psalme. An act was made that he should be deposed, if he did the like hereafter:—against which act he protested."

This Henrisone seems to have been an independent type of precentor, for a few years later we read of him being finally deposed because he would not use the Church Service-Book on its introduction.

From the foregoing extracts, as well as from other sources, we are warranted in believing that the Uptaker of the Psalme in the early Scots Kirk, whether he was "Maister of the Sang Scule," or "Lettergae," or simple "Sangster,"

or all combined, was a singularly competent official, who did his work faithfully according to his knowledge and the requirements of the time.

Moreover, there is abundant evidence to show that psalmody was an important element in Scottish Church life until the time of the Westminster Assembly, when it, and the precentor too, got a serious check by the importation from England of the custom of

### READING THE LINE

It is an old story now of how the Scots longed for, and were willing to sacrifice much on behalf of a Universal Presbyterian Church. This attitude accounts for many of the transactions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, which otherwise would be inexplicable.

One of the enactments of this memorable Assembly runs as follows: —

"That for the present, where many of the congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the minister or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof."

The Scots Commissioners resisted this proposal most strenuously, thinking it a reflection upon the intelligence and education of their people; but eventually, for the sake of peace and uniformity, they acquiesced in the change.

The Scots custom of using doxologies, or, as they were called, "conclusions," had to be given up at the same time, although, again, the Scots Commissioners strove hard to preserve their

ancient custom, Calderwood saying: "I entreat that the doxologie be not laid aside, for I hope to sing it in Heaven."

But this was not all, for in this craze for uniformity the old versions of the psalms had to go also, their place being eventually filled by the version of Frances Rous.

The Scots people were at first very bitterly opposed to these changes, viewing the introduction of the "reading of the line" with special aversion, as being not only unseemly, but an insult to their better education. Yet by and by, as interest in praise declined through apathy and neglect, and by the degrading mannerisms that crept into the service, succeeding generations began to look upon the habit of "reading the line" as a good old custom peculiar to

Scotland alone—a heritage to be dearly prized, and, if need be, to split churches rather than be given up!

There is no doubt that the changes to which we have referred, along with almost universal clerical apathy, did much to injure the musical part of Presbyterian worship in Scotland, and it took the better part of the following century to recover from the blow inflicted by these and other adverse influences.

### TIME OF DECADENCE

The period between 1650 and 1750 is singularly void of anything worthy of note occurring in connection with the music of the Scottish churches. Our neighbours in England were enjoying the fruits of a succession of musical

forces, culminating in Purcell, such as the world rarely sees. But internal dissensions, foreign invasion, episcopal intrusion, clerical apathy, and twenty-eight years of persecution, effectually prevented any attention being paid to this subject in music-loving Scotland.

We say music-loving Scotland, for at this time poetry and song were as popular as ever with the people. It was with them as it is in the natural world—you stem the course of one of our hill streams as it speeds to the valley below, and lo! shortly, there springs up upon your right hand and your left, from the verdant mountain-side, pellucid fountains that will not be denied freedom to discharge their heaven-appointed mission!

So our people, denied an outlet for

their musical sentiments in the Church, had to seek for it in secular song; nor did they seek in vain, for it is remarkable that when Church music in Scotland was at its lowest ebb, national song and lyric poetry were at full tide, comprising amongst its forces not only the prolific genius of Allan Ramsay, James Thomson, William Hamilton of Bangour, and Robert Fergusson, but such a flood of musical sentiment as that expressed by the minstrelsy of the Jacobite movement.

### A REVIVAL

Happily, there were potent influences at work which by and by led to a revival of Church music all over Scotland. "The Musical Society of Edinburgh" had much to do with this change.

Formed in 1728, for more than seventy years it took the lead in musical matters not only in Edinburgh, but in all the principal towns of Scotland. In the late Robert A. Marr's excellent book, *Music for the People*, and in Mr Harris' *History of St Cecilia Hall*, there are most interesting accounts given of the work done by this Society; and all who wish to see the high point to which musical taste and performance had attained in Edinburgh early in the eighteenth century will be highly gratified by a perusal of these works.

Another factor in the progressive movement of this time may be ascribed to the genius of Handel, whose fame had early spread northward, and whose choral works, with their sacred themes,

were making a deep and lasting impression upon the religious world.

As might have been expected, the Church could not but feel in time the stress of the musical forces which kept beating against her walls, and we begin to meet with evidence that she realised something must be done to bring herself more into line with the improved musical sentiment of the people.

"Cornforth Gilson, a chorister of Durham Cathedral, came to Edinburgh in 1756 as master of music in the city churches. The appointment arose out of an Act of the Town Council dated 26th November 1755, when it was resolved that, owing to the 'very indecent and offensive way in which Church music was performed,' a master well skilled both in the theory and practice

of Church music should be immediately employed to teach in the city." The scheme was comprehensive, and aimed at giving everyone an opportunity of learning to read music. With this in view, several schools were opened and conducted by precentors or teachers competent for the work, the whole being under the direction of Mr Gilson.

Glasgow was also moved by the rising sentiment, for we read in *The Mercury* of 22nd November 1756 the following notice:—

"By order of the Magistrates. To encourage and promote the improvement of Church music, the Magistrates have directed Mr Moor to open a free school in Hutcheson's Hospital, on Tuesday the 22nd inst., at seven o'clock in the evening, when the inhabitants of

the city will be admitted and taught at the public charge, on their producing proper certificates of their character from the minister and elders of the parish where they reside."

Aberdeen and other towns also came under the influence of the revival; and had the Church Courts been as anxious to bring about improved singing as the Civil Courts were, we might not have had so long to wait for better times.

Coming to the beginning of the nineteenth century, we find that there was a considerable increase of the musical societies of Scotland. The performance of the choral works of Handel and other composers by the Edinburgh Musical Society had made it necessary that professional singers from the English cathedrals, as well as from the Epis-

copal churches in Edinburgh, should be engaged in order to adequately render them. But a knowledge of music was now spreading amongst the wealthier classes of society, and the larger towns were feeling themselves less dependent upon Edinburgh and London for artistes to enable them to perform the works of the great masters.

The choral societies which sprang into existence at this time usually began with psalm tunes and simple anthems. The reason for this, doubtless, lay in their lacking confidence to try loftier flights; but underneath it there was also the conviction that there was little hope for success unless the clergy were propitiated. There is something almost pathetic in the kind of inarticulate cry for better Church praise which came

from all who laid any claim to the possession of musical taste at this time. For instance, in 1810 the "Edinburgh Church Music Society" was formed, the object being "the improvement in the principles and practice of vocal Church music." Then in 1814 a public meeting was held in the City Chambers of Edinburgh, when it was resolved to establish the "Institution of Sacred Music." The objects were generally stated to be "the instruction of singers in Church music and oratorios, with the view of improving the musical service in the various churches in the city."

### SCOTLAND INTERESTED

This desire for improvement was not confined to Edinburgh alone: Glasgow,

Aberdeen, Dundee, and other towns, by Press and public meeting, were calling for the music of the Church to be brought more into line with the state of efficiency which the art had attained in general society.

But it was not until the spread of education brought music teaching to full tide that those changes in thought and feeling came about which eventually swept the precentor from the desk, and floated the organ into the church.

Yet before this happened many transitions had to be passed through. Dr Mainzer's *Singing for the Million* had to become a reality of which his numerous followers were but as first-fruits. Hullah's "fixed doh" system had to be pushed, and eventually dropped. Curwen's easy, cheap, and true Tonic

Sol-fa system had to spread over the land, and show the staff singer the beauty and simplicity of the "movable doh"—thus opening up a new era, when "singing for the million" became not only a possibility, but an accomplished fact.

A glorious consummation surely; but before all this came about the precentor was faithfully doing good work, with meagre materials, and amid depressing surroundings.

## PART III

# Precentors and their Work

We fancy that nothing is better fitted to show the position music had attained in the Scottish Church than by simply describing some of the notable men who did valiant pioneer work during the first half of the nineteenth century.

### Robert Archibald Smith (1780–1829)

To no one does the Scottish Church owe more—indeed, we might even put the statement stronger, and say that to no one does she owe so much—than to Robert Archibald Smith—"R.A. Smith"

as he was familiarly called when his name became a household word in Scotland.

Although the child of Scottish parents, Smith was born in 1780 in the town of Reading, Berkshire, whither his father had gone from Paisley, the trade of silk weaving, at which he worked, being dull in the latter place.

Smith's musical gifts early asserted themselves, and when very young he had taught himself to play on the flute and the violin. His ear was more than usually acute, and as a boy he accustomed himself to note down every bit of melody that came into his memory. This habit served him well when in later years he was preparing his great work, *The Scottish Minstrel.*

Smith's family returned to Paisley in 1800; and here it was that young

ROBERT ARCHIBALD SMITH

(1780-1829)

(*From a Print in Paisley Museum*)

"R. A." made the acquaintance of Tannahill, the setting of whose song, "Jessie, the Flow'r o' Dunblane," first made him known to the world as a musical composer. But we should have to traverse a wider field than precenting implies were we to speak of Smith's secular compositions. They are as varied as they are numerous, and beautiful withal.

Smith was appointed precentor in the Abbey Church of Paisley in 1807. Being somewhat shy and very sensitive, every appearance he made in "the desk" caused him more anxiety and perturbation than even his most intimate friends were aware of, and it was long before he could face his Sunday duties with comfort. Working away, however, with all his might, he soon got together a well-

trained " band," which made the " soft " singing of the Abbey Kirk famous all over the west of Scotland.

The work Smith was doing in Paisley soon reached the ear of Dr Andrew Thomson, the minister of St George's, Edinburgh, who was himself an excellent musician, and, after permission had been given by the Town Council, who were patrons of all city Church appointments at that time, the worthy Doctor and his session invited " R. A." to become their precentor.

To the metropolis, therefore, he came in 1823 ; and from that time a new era began in Church music. It would be impossible to speak too highly of Smith's varied gifts and his industry. Teaching music from morn till night, he yet found time to write sacred and secular music

that might have taken the whole time of any man. In psalmody, the *Sacred Music for St George's Church*, which he wrote along with his minister, is an excellent book; and such tunes as "Invocation" and "St George's, Edinburgh" will hold their own as long as the spirit of psalmody lives in the Presbyterian Church. But it was *Sacred Harmony for the Church of Scotland* that made Smith's name a household word all over the land. Many psalters have come and gone since *Sacred Harmony* first saw the light, but it still commands respect on account of its excellence as a high-class compendium of praise.

Then there were the *Congregational Anthems*. These were the sheet-anchor of singing classes for more than half-a-century; and happy indeed was the

precentor and choir about the "sixties" when they could give a public concert at which they rendered R. A. Smith's "How beautiful upon the Mountains" or "The Earth is the Lord's," two of his better-known compositions.

To the universal regret of his church and the community this talented precentor and composer died in 1829, in the mid-time of his days and the full flood of his popularity and usefulness. Beautiful tributes were paid to him by Press and Church, and his name was long affectionately cherished by all who knew his worth. Paisley is proud of Smith, and has in its museum his violin and many of his manuscripts.

A few years after Smith's death a stranger was standing beside "Mons Meg" in Edinburgh Castle, evidently

delighted with the grand scene presented by the city and its surroundings. A gentleman addressed him, remarking: "A splendid town, Edinburgh." On which the stranger looked at the speaker a moment, and said: "Oh, guid enough; but, tell me this: What wad it be withoot Paisley?"

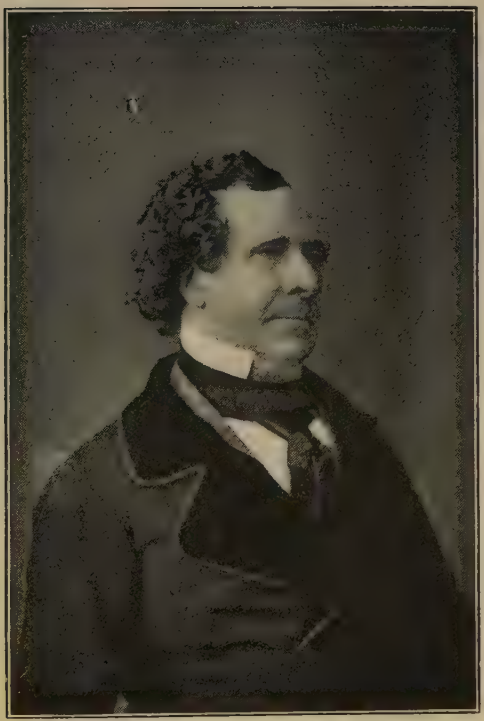
"How so?" said the first speaker.

"Weel, ye see, it's no that I'm a Paisley man mysel'; but d'ye see the College? Well, Professor John Wilson's a Paisley man! And d'ye see St George's Kirk? Weel, R. A. Smith was the precentor o't. And tell me this," he concluded triumphantly, "Whaur wad yer singin' hae been had he no' cum' frae Paisley?"

JOHN TEMPLETON (1802–1886)

who became known to the world as one of the most famous vocalists of his time, was born in 1802 in the village of Riccarton, near Kilmarnock. He came of a very musical family, his father, and all his brothers, having uncommonly good voices, and it was quite a common sight to see a number of people standing at the window of their little house on the main street of the village listening intently while the rare-voiced Templetons sang to the accompaniment of the weaver's shuttle.

James, the eldest brother, came to Edinburgh early in 1800, and became one of the chief singers in the city. Amongst other appointments, he held that of precentor to St Andrew's Church,



JOHN TEMPLETON
(1802-1886)

and received the large salary, for that time, of £60 per annum.

It was to help at his brother's concerts, that John, with his beautiful soprano voice, came to Edinburgh when only twelve years old.

After some years of this life he began his musical career as precentor in a Secession church in Edinburgh, of which the minister was Dr Brown, the father of the author of *Rab and His Friends*. Templeton's connection with the Seceders began in 1822, when he was just twenty years of age; but in spite of his youth his voice was well set, and its beautiful tenor quality drew large numbers of strangers to the church to hear such precenting.

The psalm tunes of those days were not like those of the present, syllabic

chorales, but were florid and melodic, and, as the older precentors used to say, "They gied your v'ice a chance."

Templeton made the most of his "chance," and soon was advised to make solo-singing his profession. There was much head-shaking amongst the worthy Seceders when their young precentor resolved to go to London and study music with a view to operatic singing; but study he did, making his first appearance on the stage in 1828. Prior to this London appearance he had to undertake some hard work at provincial houses, at little or no salary, chiefly to gain experience. It was his great success when singing at Southampton Opera House, that caused the manager of Covent Garden to invite him to London. His career as the leading tenor in opera

was brilliant, and his association with Malibran and other great artistes brought him fame and fortune.

But opera alone did not absorb his talent; he also gave splendid ballad concerts and musical lectures. His beautiful singing of Scottish songs was one of the most memorable features of his concerts; and it is as a brilliant exponent of the songs of his native land that he doubtless owes his medallion memorial at the south-west side of the Calton Hill, Edinburgh, beside those of Wilson and Kennedy.

Templeton retired from public life when little more than fifty years of age, and thus escaped the awful sense of waning power which so often makes the lives of eminent singers painful. He enjoyed the esteem of hosts of devoted

friends, and died much regretted, so re-recently as 1st July 1886, in his eighty-fourth year.

Previous to his death, he frequently came out of his retirement at Brighton to sing for some charity. I have in my possession a lithographed address presented to him by many (sixty-one) of the leading musical men of the west of Scotland when he sang in Kilmarnock in aid of a charity in March, 1879.

The fervour and affection displayed in the address is unique even in such testimonials. Many of those who signed were not content to append their name merely, but often added a personal touch, such as the editor of *The Ayr Advertiser*, Thomas M. Gemmell, who adds: "One of his oldest friends and most ardent admirers"; and the grandson of Robert

Burns—Robert Burns Thomson—who breaks into verse:

"In tasting pleasures ever new
Or braving fortune's fiercest blasts,
His 'op'ning gowan wat wi' dew,'—
(as sung by Templeton)
Will live with me while mem'ry lasts."—R.B.T.

The language of such an address to one who won his spurs as a "mere precentor" is unparalleled, and the concluding paragraph may stand insertion here:

"Receive and accept then at the hands of a few of your countrymen (who might have numbered thousands) this testimony of our admiration, loving remembrance, and affectionate esteem for 'our own John Templeton,' who stands alone as the inimitable Scotch singer, and who in the evening of life occupies a

foremost place in their hearts, and whose desire for his comfort and happiness in this world is only surpassed by their hopes that in the next, his soul-stirring song will contribute a share to the harmonies of the future, and add to the swelling wave of praise that rolls o'er the heavenly plains."

Evidently the great singer was no common man.

Here are two precenting incidents in Templeton's life, which, so far as I know, have never been recorded.

It is told that, after he had become famous as the finest tenor of the day, he returned to Edinburgh for a short holiday, and made a point of calling on Dr Brown—his old minister, then in Broughton Place Church.

In the course of their conversation

Dr Brown said: "Oh, John, I wish you would give us a day in the desk." Templeton at once cordially complied with the request, but stipulated that the arrangement should be kept quiet.

Whether it was owing to the birds of the air, or some equally unusual agency making the matter known, does not appear, but when Templeton entered the "desk" the church was crowded to the door. The service began by Dr Brown giving out a psalm, to which the famous singer took the grand double common metre tune called "St Matthew." Those who know this tune will recall that the first part is grand and inspiring, opening in "C" Major. The second part is equally fine, modulating into "A" Minor. The last two lines return to the original key, and finish with a ring of triumph.

As Templeton soared through the varying modes with his beautiful voice, the congregational singing gradually fell off until, when the second stanza was reached, not a voice was heard from the pews, emotion, or something akin to it, bringing an impressive stillness over all.

When the prescribed number of verses had been sung, but before Templeton could shut the book, Dr Brown leaned over the pulpit, and in his kindly voice, touched with emotion, said: "Just go on, John; just go on!"

Yes; when voice and tune and spirit meet there is a magnetic power in psalmody; and certainly there is no medium likely to call it forth quicker than the fine example of Church music which we have in Dr Croft's beautiful "St Matthew."

We wonder what "Jeems," the door-keeper, thought of it all as he crooned one of his six psalm tunes in the lonely room at the top of a long stair in Lochend Close that Sunday night?

One old lady who heard Templeton precent on this occasion, and who was alive until a few years ago, used to tell of the incident, and in a voice thrilling with emotion she always added: "And when he was dune, we were a' grettin'."

Once when Templeton and Malibran and a quartet of eminent artistes were touring in Scotland the stage-coach broke down just as they neared Aberdeen. There being no help at hand, and as the night was stormy, they were glad to avail themselves of the shelter of a farmhouse, which was kindly placed at their disposal. Treated most hospitably by the

farmer and his family, the storm-stayed singers found the evening pass pleasantly away.

When the hour for retiring to rest drew near, the farmer said they "wad tak' the Book." The foreign artistes did not at once understand, but Templeton did.

"What psalm?" he asked.

"Oh, we'd better tak' the 103rd."

So, having handed round books, the farmer began the psalm to the tune of "Coleshill." The family had most of the singing to themselves in the first verse, but in the second suddenly the walls seemed to open, and such a burst of harmony filled the room as farmhouse never heard before nor since.

Next morning as the strangers were leaving they proffered some acknow-

ledgment for the hospitality that had been shown them.

"What," said the farmer, "gie money to us! I dinna ken wha ye are, but I'm far wrang if we've no' been entertaining angels unawares."

## John Wilson (1800–1849)

a famous precentor, but a still more famous artiste, was born in the Canongate, Edinburgh, in 1800. Like many other singers, he began life as a printer, but while learning his trade he also worked hard at the study of music. He was an apprentice in Ballantyne's famous printing office, and it is said that while here he, being a "reader," was one of the few who were acquainted with the authorship of the Waverley Novels.

It is said that he had a very poor voice at this time, but so determined was he to be a singer that he was constantly singing while at his work. Mr Ballantyne said to him one day: "Oh, John, I wish you would stop that hum-humming, for I am sure you will never be a singer."

He early became a member of the choir of Duddingston Church, but soon after was appointed precentor of Roxburgh Place Relief Church. Here he won golden opinions for his fine singing, his voice being of remarkable compass, from B to B in Alt—two octaves of pure tenor quality. Wilson did not stay long with the Relief folk, for in 1825 we find him appointed to St Mary's Established Church, Edinburgh, and also leaving his trade, and devoting himself wholly to the teaching of music.

JOHN WILSON
(1800-1849)

While teaching others he still worked hard to improve himself, taking lessons in singing from the best teachers in Edinburgh and London, such as Finlay Dun, Lanza and Crivilli, for singing, and Aspull for harmony, and studying harmony and counterpoint with eminent masters. It is little wonder that such an industrious and talented musician should have made his precenting famous, and have drawn large crowds to his church.

In January 1830 Wilson left St Mary's, having finally resolved to become a public singer. In March of the same year he made his first appearance on the Edinburgh stage as Harry Bertram in *Guy Mannering*. This is an interesting event, not for the singer alone, but because Sir Walter Scott was present at this, the

first performance of his dramatised novel.

Wilson appeared in London as chief tenor in many operas; but he never forgot or neglected Scottish songs, and at concerts the late precentor delighted thousands by his tuneful rendering of his native melodies.

For several years the two Scottish lads, Templeton and Wilson, were princes of song of all kinds, but north of the Tweed their memories are cherished chiefly as unrivalled exponents of Scottish song.

They were not rivals, although both were singing in London at the same time, for Covent Garden and Drury Lane Opera Houses were under one management, and the chief artistes divided their time between the houses, and so were never allowed to clash.

As to their characteristics, it has been said: "Templeton's greater powers and rich falsetto excited wonder; Wilson drew tears."

When Queen Victoria visited Taymouth Castle in 1842 Wilson had the honour of singing before her. On this occasion, after Wilson had sung the songs chosen by the Queen from his list, her Majesty said: "There is a song which is not on your list that I should like to hear. Can you sing 'Wae's me for Prince Charlie'?" Wilson, fortunately, could sing it, and did so, much to the Queen's delight. The Queen's list is still to be seen at Taymouth Castle, and the songs are as follows:—"Lochaber No More," "The Lass o' Gowrie," "The Laird o' Cockpen," "The Flowers of the Forest," "John Anderson, my Jo," "Cam

ye by Atholl." Tours by concert companies were common at this time; and Wilson's were famous, visiting all the chief towns in this country, and also those of America in 1838, not a very easy matter in those days.

He visited Canada in 1849, and when in Quebec he went angling one day and got so soaked with rain that he took a chill, from which he never recovered, dying there in the month of July, in his forty-ninth year.

As was remarked by the Press of that time: "He did much for the music and lyric poetry of his native country. He made them familiar to English homes and hearts, he deepened their influence among ourselves, and he gave them a new life and popularity on the banks of the Hudson and the St Lawrence."

There must have been something very magnetic about Wilson's personality. I have more than once spoken to some old friends about certain singers of Scottish songs, and have had my commendation cut short by the remark: "I've heard John Wilson!"

In a London drawing-room a lady was singing a Scottish song very nicely indeed. At the close of the first verse an elderly gentleman was observed to leave the room, and was heard later on to frankly give as his excuse: "I've heard John Wilson sing that song!" It is a pity that the old gentleman's hero worship made him forget his manners.

The late Sheriff Watson of Aberdeen remarked to the writer that he had asked Wilson how it was that his songs were always so fresh, although he must have

sung many of them a hundred times. Wilson replied: "It is just because I have sung them a hundred times." "Do you not know, sir," he continued, "we never enter a town where we are to give a concert at night but we have a full rehearsal of our programme, although we may have given every item at a concert the night before."

A true artist was John Wilson, whether as precentor in a Relief kirk or as first tenor at Covent Garden—one who knew there was no royal road to success save the somewhat toilsome one of taking pains.

He published a selection of psalm tunes when he was a precentor. He also published *Wilson's Edition of Songs of Burns*, and wrote tunes to several favourite Scottish songs, for example:

"Bonnie Bessie Lee," and "The Sea Mew," now known as "Turn Ye To Me." He was a genuine lover of music, and ever set a high standard of art before him both in professional attainments and personal character.

### David Kennedy (1827–1886)

Another notable precentor in Edinburgh was David Kennedy, at one time a famous Scottish vocalist. Before coming to the metropolis he had been a precentor in his native city, Perth, where his father and uncle had been precentors before him.

The church that secured his services was Nicolson Street United Presbyterian, and for the five years that he held office his work was greatly appreciated. It

was at this time that he began teaching singing in schools and congregational classes. He also was conductor of the Tonic Sol-fa Choral Union.

His manner as a teacher was very genial; he treated his classes much as he treated his audiences in later years. We know one person who will never forget how, when there was some doubt about his being admitted to a certain church class, owing to being "only a boy," he received an encouraging pat on the shoulder from Kennedy, with the cheery remark: "No, no, let him stay; he's not a bit too young; he'll maybe be a precentor yet—wha kens!" A prophetic remark, as it turned out.

But precenting had to give way to the fascination of the auld Scots sangs, and the Scot at home and abroad got

DAVID KENNEDY
(1827-1886)
*(From a photograph by W. Crooke, Edinburgh)*

what the Church lost. We learn from Kennedy's memoirs, however, that "the improvement of the musical services of the Church was a matter he had always at heart," and that "on his long and arduous tours through Canada he would lead the psalmody in the two Presbyterian kirks on Sunday."

Kennedy's admiration for Templeton and Wilson, his two great predecessors as exponents of Scottish song, has always seemed to us a very beautiful feature in his character, and his kindness in restoring and making arrangements for the upkeep of Wilson's tombstone in Quebec Churchyard merits the highest praise. David Kennedy died at Quebec in 1886, greatly mourned by Scotsmen in all parts of the world.

I confess that I have always been

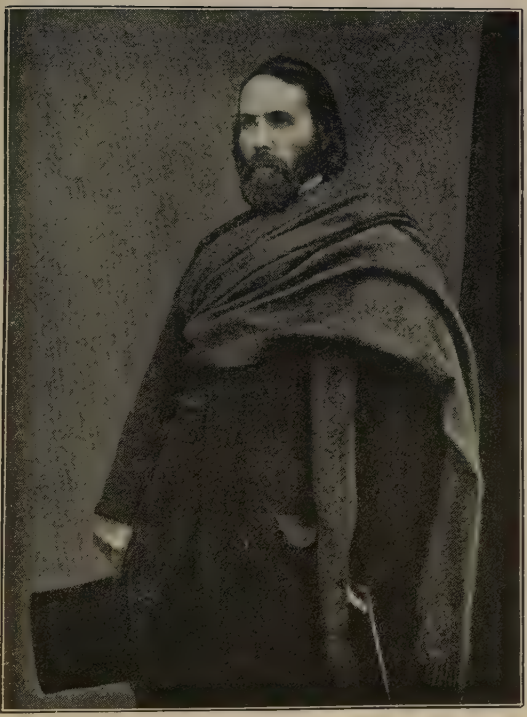
most impressed by the marvellous pluck and industry of Templeton, Wilson and Kennedy, even while admitting and admiring their talent.

"The heights to which some men have reached
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night."

### Thomas Legerwood Hately
### (1815–1867)

was another notable printer-musician. In early life he was a member of R. A. Smith's choir, and afterwards held the office of precentor in North Leith and St Mary's (Edinburgh) Established churches.

At the Disruption in 1843 he left the Established Church, and led the singing at the first Free Church General Assembly, beginning on the second day, and continu-



THOMAS LEGERWOOD HATELY
(1815-1867)

ing to do so at each Assembly for twenty-three years.

He is distinguished for the composition of several popular Church tunes and as a successful teacher of congregational classes. He was held in high esteem by all who knew him. His death took place in 1867.[1]

### Walter Strang

was another famous precentor with a fine tenor voice. Besides being widely employed as a teacher of music, he held the post of leader of praise to Free St George's Church from 1848–1885. He was also precentor to the Free Church General Assembly from 1867–1888.

[1] In an interesting book, *A Scottish Psalmodist*, his son and daughter have issued for private circulation a filial tribute to their father's work and character.

Strang had the gift of melodious composition, but his many engagements restricted its exercise. Publicly and privately he was much esteemed.

### Joseph Geoghegan

Lecturer on Music at the Established Church Training College, Edinburgh, was a precentor whose duties merged into those of the choirmaster. His work and that of his colleague, Mr R. S. Riddell, in Old Greyfriars Church, along with Dr Lee at the beginning of the Organ Crusade, marks an important epoch in Scottish Church music. Holding many important appointments in school and college as a music master, Geoghegan led a busy life, and was widely known and appreciated. His memory is kept

green by a flourishing musical club, which bears his name.

### Thomas M. Hunter

was one of the most notable precentors of his time. Striking in appearance, light of foot, it was almost impossible to meet him on the street without concluding that he was no ordinary man. His school and private work might have proved too much for most men, but he got through it with ease, and to the end his fine tenor voice retained the quality and power that it had when first he appeared in the Music Hall as tenor soloist in Handel's oratorio of "Samson."

As precentor of Rose Street United Presbyterian Church, Edinburgh, he was very popular and painstaking, and the

congregational singing long retained quite a distinctive character.

Pressure of engagements prevented Hunter, like many others in his profession, from fully exercising his talent for composition, although many of his school songs are popular.

### James Sneddon, Mus.Bac. Cantab.

Mr James Sneddon was well known in musical and educational circles. As a teacher of singing he was eminently successful, and during his long service under the Edinburgh School Board, extending over a period of about thirty-four years, he did much to raise the standard of musical training in Edinburgh. A native of the Dunfermline district, his first lessons in music and a

great deal of his enthusiasm for the art were obtained from Mr Love, at that time a well-known teacher of music in Dunfermline. At the age of eighteen Mr Sneddon was appointed precentor in the Parish Church of Moss Green, and shortly afterwards, in 1856, he received a similar appointment at Free St Mark's Church, Glasgow. The tonic sol-fa movement being then at its inception, he attended classes conducted by the late Rev. John Curwen, the pioneer of the movement, in the Andersonian College, and took all the musical certificates which it was possible for the College to give. He soon became one of the leaders of the movement in the West of Scotland, and was for many years a member of the Council in London. In 1870 he accepted the post of leader of psalmody in

Lauriston Place United Presbyterian Church under the Rev. Mr Croom, a step which necessitated his removal to Edinburgh. The musical association in connection with the church soon became a pronounced success, and its annual concert became very popular. He resigned the appointment in 1886. This was the last church appointment which he held. In 1873 the Edinburgh School Board appointed him to be one of their teachers of singing, and he continued in that capacity until his resignation in 1907. In his earlier years he also conducted large and successful singing classes and musical associations in different parts of the country, notably in Fife, Kinross, Dumbarton, the Lothians and Borders. Notwithstanding his many activities, Mr Sneddon never ceased his

studies in the theory and practice of music, and in 1885 he had the satisfaction of taking, after examination, the degree of Mus.Bac. of St John's College, Cambridge. A prolific writer, he was the author of numerous school song-books and of various text-books and treatises on the art of singing, counterpoint, and harmony. He published a popular arrangement of Scottish songs, and his lectures on that subject were both instructive and entertaining. Some of his publications have had a wide circulation. Mr Sneddon was a man of boundless energy and perseverance, and possessed the gift of transmitting his enthusiasm to his pupils. His activities were not, however, confined to music. He loved literature, especially poetry, and being endowed with a marvellous memory, his conversa-

tion was always illuminating and entertaining. For over twenty years he was an active member of the Edinburgh Shakespeare Society. Like in the case of his friend, David Kennedy, his interest in Church praise grew stronger with his years.

### J. Campbell Grant

was a well-known precentor and singing master in Edinburgh. His first church was Lady Yester's Established; and thereafter, for twenty-five years, he led the singing in Lothian Road United Presbyterian Church. He was also a very good exponent of Scottish song, and lectured frequently on the subject.

It is impossible within the limits of the present work to do more than mention

the names of a few other precentors in the eastern district, who, with those already given, "have finished their course":

Gleadhill, Kenward, Palmer, John and George Bishop, W. Templeton, Hutton, Hume, Ramage, Ebsworth, Darling, Heriot, Kerr, Cairns, Walter Hately, Bell, Towert, Mackay, Wilson of Dalkeith, and Ross of Kelso.

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"Dundee's wild, warbling measures" have never lacked exponents in the town which bears that name; and, without giving offence to the memory of many worthy musicians, we may be allowed to single out the late

MR DAVID STEPHEN (1823–1879)

as one of her most typical precentors.

Born in the year 1823, in the parish

of Panbride, Forfarshire, and being possessed of a very fine tenor voice, Stephen at an early age was found leading the singing in one of the Carnoustie churches. Upon leaving the country he came to Dundee to settle. For a short time he was precentor to St Peter's Church, but soon transferred his services to Free St Paul's Church, then just formed, where he continued to precent until his death in 1879.

In early life Stephen was in great demand as a soloist at concerts, etc., but as music was not his sole profession his musical talents were latterly exercised almost exclusively on behalf of Church work.

His congregational choir and musical association were noted for their excellent training, and their work, along with that

DAVID STEPHEN

DUNDEE

(1823-1879)

of their conductor, was an important factor in advancing congregational singing in Dundee.

## PRECENTORS IN THE WEST

In his excellent work, *Scottish Church Music*, Mr James Love has some interesting remarks about several Scottish composers who were also precentors. While it is obvious that we cannot present an anthology of all the famous tenants of the " desk " in Glasgow, yet we desire to record the names of a few familiar to the churches who are treated at greater length by Mr Love :—

James Merrylees; James Allan; William Broomfield, composer of " St Kilda "; Neil Dougall, composer of " Kilmarnock "; Robert Simpson, com-

poser of "Balerma"; Hugh Wilson, composer of "Martyrdom"; Henry Boyd; William Brown; Alexander Duncan; John M'Lauchlan; James Steven.

### William M. Miller (1831– )

William Mackie Miller, born 1831, was a distinguished teacher of music and a successful precentor. As an ardent exponent of the Tonic Sol-fa method, he took a leading place in Glasgow and the west of Scotland, and did much, by classes and school song-books, to spread a knowledge of music in the community.

He also rendered invaluable service as a Music Superintendent of the Glasgow School Board. Miller gave up precenting on being appointed Musical Inspector for the Church of Scotland.

Few men led a busier life, and his death left a blank difficult to fill.

## PRECENTORS OF ABERDEEN

### John Sivewright

was not only a notable precentor, but also a celebrated itinerant teacher of psalmody when the revival of the art took place in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

A local skit written more than one hundred years ago, regarding some of his doings, is still popular :

> "In the year o' 1794,
> When Hielant John the hills came o'er,
> He taught them a' to gape and glower,
> And sing the tunes in Fordoun."

He does not seem to have been always

successful, however, for one of his pupils came to grief one day, when—

> "Up startit then the bricht Dunbar,
> Instead of better, he did waur,
> An' a' the singing he did mar,
> And lost the lines in Fordoun."

Of a different type was another of Aberdeen's precentors—

### William Maxwell Shaw ( -1805)

He was a pupil of Urbani, and a frequent performer at the concerts of the Musical Society of Edinburgh about the close of the eighteenth century. More, doubtless, would have been heard of Shaw had he not removed to America in 1805, where he died after a residence of only a few months.

Regarding his precenting, it has been said:

"His manner of singing the psalms was characterised by a fine simplicity, blended with sparing ornament; and his taste was so much admired that the congregation accompanied him very softly, that they might be able to hear his beautifully round and manly voice, which appeared to fill the church without any exertion or disagreeable loudness."

In addition to the foregoing, we would present two typical examples of the nineteenth-century Aberdeen precentor, from notes supplied by Mr William Litster, himself a popular teacher of music in that city.

### Mr David Taylor

was precentor of Free Trinity Church for seventeen years (1857–1874). He

was an enthusiastic musician and took a deep interest in the marvellous wave of musical progress that swept over the city during his term of office.

Although neither a professional musician, nor a teacher of classes for the people, he made a high reputation for the manner in which he trained his own church choir.

Mr Litster, who succeeded him in 1874, speaks in the highest terms of his work.

### Mr Ludovic Grant Sandison

was leader of the old historical church of Greyfriars, which was taken down to make room for the University buildings. He held this office for twenty-eight years (1856–1884), and practically died at his post, being but a short time ill.

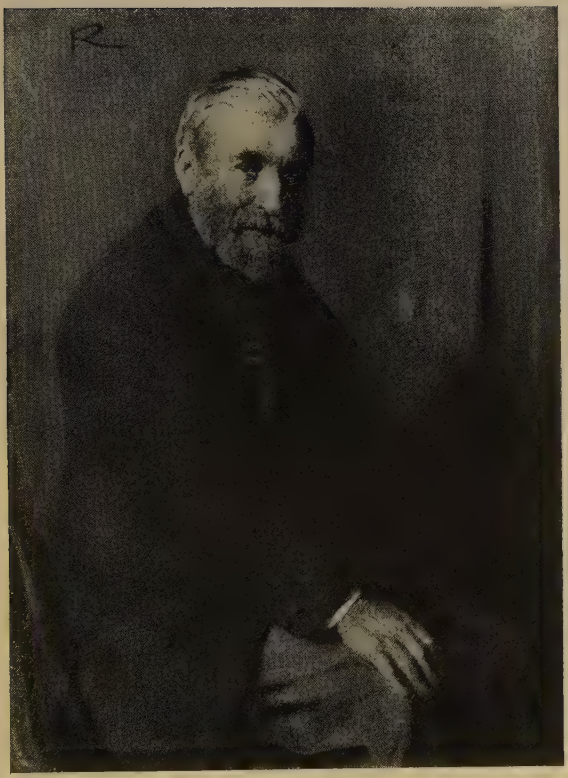
Besides Church work, he carried on numerous public classes, which did much to make music popular with the people. Indeed, "Sandison's Classes" were household words in Aberdeen about the "seventies." He was the kind of man whose personality and work commands respect, and we are not surprised to learn that the late Rev. John Curwen, of Tonic Sol-fa fame, held him in the highest esteem.

WILLIAM CARNIE, EDITOR OF "THE NORTHERN PSALTER" (1824–1908)

was the last of the great Scottish Psalmodists, and worthily carried out the work of Presbyterian Church music revival so strikingly and successfully begun by R. A. Smith in the first quarter of last century.

Mr Carnie's graphic *Reminiscences* will be invaluable to the future historian of Aberdeen, if, indeed, they are not accepted as in themselves a complete history of that city for the last sixty years. His poetic gifts were of a high order, and few of the more important local events —church, artistic, municipal or personal —but found a pleasing and enduring record in his verses. Indeed, Mr Carnie's genial personality was a dominating note in the life of Aberdeen for more than fifty years.

But it is by his *Northern Psalter* that he is best known elsewhere, and the motto which he attached to it—"Sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David" (2 Chron. xxix. v. 30)—indicates the sincerity of its mission as an incentive to congregational singing.



WILLIAM CARNIE
(1824-1908)

The book had a phenomenal circulation, and it was truly said of it some years ago by Rev. John Curwen: "*The Northern Psalter* is used in four churches out of five in the north of Scotland, and by all denominations."

This success is not surprising, for, unlike many books on church music, it was the work of a man who—as he styled himself in a note to the present writer—was "an ancient brother of the Box, or, as he has said elsewhere on this point: "*The Northern Psalter* is compiled by one who has learned from long experience what congregations can and what they cannot do."

Besides this experience, he taught and conducted classes and choirs of all sizes, his only instrumental aid being, as he was wont to say, "a small pocket tuning-fork!"

Many of our finest psalm tunes first saw the light in *The Northern Psalter*, and Mr Carnie spared neither trouble nor expense to secure certain copyright tunes by Sullivan, Dykes and other eminent composers to enhance its value and further his ideal.

More than once it was suggested by some interested in Church music that the Established and Free Churches of Scotland should adopt *The Northern Psalter* as their authorised tune-book, but other counsels prevailed.

The death in 1908 of such an able and withal such a modest man as Mr William Carnie affected a wider area than Aberdeen ; for all, wheresoever they may be, who love the strains of simple psalmody will for many generations to come keep the memory green of the

honoured and gifted compiler of *The Northern Psalter*.

It should be said that his portrait, painted by Sir George Reid, hangs in the Royal Infirmary in Aberdeen, of which he was secretary for fifty years.

These have all joined "the choir invisible," but even the very mention of their names helps to show what a splendid race of capable men many of the old precentors were.

The Scottish organist has, in most instances, still got his spurs to win. We can only hope that as the years roll on a race of native players will arise, as zealous and as capable in the new methods as the occupants of the desk and the leaders of the band were in the old.

## THE COUNTRY PRECENTOR

So far we have been drawing our types of precentors from the town, as it would require a larger canvas than we have allowed ourselves to portray all the men who in the north and west were equally helpful to the churches.

The rural precentor was unique, and not always entirely competent ; but in many provincial towns there were precentors possessing good voices who filled the desk creditably, and who frequently found their way to large town churches, where a precentorship often carried with it the appointment to a good position in an office or a factory. Sometimes, both in county town and rural parish, precentors were difficult to get. In such cases certain failings in a possible candidate

were often winked at. It was like the case of the old Scottish lady of bygone days, who, when cautioned about a certain applicant for the position of cook in her house, exclaimed: "Character! What care I aboot her character? Can she mak' collops?"

So with church managers. It was often: "Never fash your head what he is. Can the lad sing?"

In country districts many a good voice held forth and gave loyally of its best, receiving small encouragement in the form of fee from either heritors or people. When the schoolmaster could sing he often added the duties of the desk to his other offices, but often the minister had to lead the singing himself. This was a reversion to Reformation times, as then the minister had to be the precentor

or find a substitute. Sometimes a yearly collection, taken up in the ladle, was all the payment the precentor got; and I have known many instances where men walked long distances to precent in certain churches for £3 a year, grudgingly doled out.

There is a district known to me where the precentor received a suit of clothes once a year instead of wages. The poor man was sorely distressed as the time for sending round the ladle drew near. When the fateful Sunday came, and the minister intimated that the collection would now be taken to provide John with a suit of clothes, poor John could stand it no longer, and shouted out: "I tell't ye I wadna hae it! I tell't ye I wadna hae it!" and rushed out of the desk, never to return.

A somewhat different view of payment by a "collection" was held by a worthy precentor in Fife. He usually divided his services between the kirk in his village and a *quoad sacra* three miles away. On one of his "collection" days he was returning from the latter place with the amount collected—mostly coppers, sad to say—in the tail pocket of his coat. Ere he reached home, however, the lining of the pocket gave way, and the entire coinage rolled along the road.

Viewing the wreckage somewhat disconsolately, he was heard muttering:

"Yes, it's aye the way. I was far ower uplifted, and I felt sure my pride would ha'e a fa'!"

Always interested in matters pertaining to Church praise, I have ever been in sympathy with the precentors who

loyally served the cause in lonely places and amid cheerless surroundings. The following character sketches may introduce some typical examples of the worthy men whom the writer has met in such circumstances; and in speaking of them the use of the personal pronoun may be pardoned.

## A VILLAGE PRECENTOR

My first impression of what precenting really was came upon me in a village church which we attended when the summer vacation set the younger members of the family free from school. It was in those days of lang, lang syne, when skies seemed ever blue and birds seemed ever singing.

The worthy man who filled the "desk"

held several offices, one of them being that of village postmaster; but it was when leading the singing on Sunday that he appeared in his greatest office and in his fullest glory. The impression made on my mind then was that precenting must be a somewhat painful occupation. The strange contortions of knitted brow, twisted mouth, and staring eyeball could only arise from such some sensation; whilst the sounds which accompanied these actions were suggestive of anything but calm enjoyment.

And yet he could unbend and become wonderfully familiar with some chosen crony as they made their way homeward by the kirk loan. Johnnie Burton even reported to some of us at the damside one day that he had heard Mac. tell the beadle that he was "in wonderfu' v'ice

last Sunday." But this act of condescension was never fully proved ; besides, Johnnie had the reputation of being given to "romance" a bit.

The conduct of two or three boys in the sparsely filled back gallery was a sore trial to our friend of the desk, and I often passed the whole forenoon wondering what would happen if he were really to leave his seat and take them into custody. Visions of dark cells below the church, where such offenders were said to have been confined, were often before me. So also they seemed to be with a pale-faced lad who sat in the minister's pew on Sundays, but who on weekdays used to join us in the absorbing sport of minnow-fishing in the dark, still pools of the Water of Leith. But this pale-faced boy was no ordinary

visionary, and he is now known to the world as Robert Louis Stevenson.

It is needless to say that there is no precentor's desk in that village kirk now. Yet to some of us the place is all the poorer for the absence of Mac. and his desk, and the pale-faced boy in the minister's pew.

### A YARROW PRECENTOR

The worthiest type of the good old country precentor I have ever met was Mac., the Cappercleuch schoolmaster. Far in the heart of Selkirkshire there lie the Yarrow kirks. For forty-two years Mac. trudged on Sunday from Cappercleuch, on the banks of St Mary's Loch, to the kirk down Yarrow and home again—a distance of fifteen miles—and few indeed were the days that found

him absent. Precentors are very fond of—well, not praise, but approbation. I remember being with Professor Blackie when he told Mac.—every word being accented by a thump of his famous big stick—"that-people-needed-to-come-to-the-country-to-learn-how-the-Psalms-of-David-should-be-sung." Mac. lived upon these words for many days.

Our friend was an elder of the Free Church, and sometimes came as a representative to the General Assembly. The last time I saw him there was on a field-day a good number of years ago. Near the Moderator's chair, on either hand, are seats usually given up to ex-moderators and other prominent members. On this occasion, just in the middle of the second seat on the right, sat Mac., his homespun grey suit making

him very conspicuous among so many black coats. But never man gave more attention to a debate, not a word was missed, and until the adjournment came he never moved. When I saw him in the autumn of that year, he said: "Of a' the seats in the house, yon's the one I like best, and I aye tak' it when I'm up."

Worthy man! if service to the Church entitled a man to any particular seat, he deserved a front one. He now rests in St Mary's Kirkyard, by the lonesome loch he loved so well, and the district is all the poorer for his loss.

### THE PRECENTOR OF BOSTON'S KIRK

In the neighbouring valley of Ettrick, a few miles to the south of Yarrow, is

to be found the kirk of Thomas Boston, author of *The Fourfold State*, *The Crook in the Lot*, etc. Here for many years Andra M. filled the office of precentor. Twenty miles from the nearest railway station, it can easily be understood that he had few compeers, and no rival. The first time I heard Andra precent was when we were holidaying in the valley twenty years ago. Seldom have I heard a finer natural voice anywhere—high tenor, with a singular quality that thrilled the ear at once—perhaps the rich accents of the Borders making it act all the quicker.

Like most of us, Andra had his foibles, one of them being a proneness to resent any participation in the praise by outsiders. I usually managed to smuggle in an obligato tenor to the high treble

of the "desk"; but one day a friend was with me who assisted with a sort of "Methody" bass. This was more than Andra could stand, so the next tune was set "up to Kew," as my friend remarked, with the result that both of us were silenced.

If Andra's range of tunes had been at all in keeping with the range of his voice he would have been unrivalled; but, unfortunately, he knew only seven or eight psalm tunes, and had no means of adding to his collection, for he could not read music, and could not trust his ear in psalmody, although in song singing he was the best in the parish. Many a time the minister's wife got him to come to the Manse to practise a new tune, and after he seemed to have thoroughly mastered it a Sunday would be set for

its introduction. On the morning of that day, however, Andra would invariably appear quite dowie and distraught, saying he "hadna slept a wink a' nicht," and he "didna think he wad try that new yin the day."

A few years ago we were again staying in Ettrick. The precentor had been long speaking about paying a visit to a son in Moffat "if he could get somebody to tak' the dask." It was suggested that on one particular Sunday I might be asked to do duty, and so relieve him. This I would only consent to do with the distinct approval of Andra, and such a delicate matter required a good deal of diplomacy; but eventually all was arranged.

On the Saturday afternoon previous to the Sunday in question I was angling

up near the source of the Ettrick, in that beautiful glen where, as tradition has it, "Will o' Phahope saw the fairies." It was one of those autumn days that in a pastoral region intensify solitude. Sunlight filtered through a gauze-like atmosphere; there were fitful puffs of wind that did not blow fifty yards; insect life there was, without motion, but not without sound, for from populated reeds and grasses there arose a tremulous hum as from faint æolian harps hidden at their roots; while the wild bird's fitful cry and the sound of the distant waterfall completed the slumbrous diapason. At such a time action is impertinent: you can only lie upon your back among the heather, and, with your eyes in the lift, see visions.

I was recalled to life by seeing a real

figure crossing my line of sight, for far up the slopes of Bodesbeck Law a pedestrian seemed to be working his way towards the bridle-path that leads to the head of Ettrick. Who could he be whom Fate had destined to climb mountains on such a day? I had begun to weave a nice little history for him of the Wandering Jew, Ancient Mariner, Rip van Winkle order, when a voice hailed me far up the heights: "Hey! d'ye ca' that fishin'?"

It was Andra! Good man, the thought of an interloper in the desk next day was too much for his loyal soul, so, despite the attractions of Moffat and the persuasions of his son, he was making for home by the shortest cut in order to defend his post.

The following (Sunday) morning I was making my way leisurely up the kirk loan when I saw Andra standing at the Manse gate. He accosted me without a smile, as if his reception at the Manse that morning had been somewhat cool, and in answer to my "Good-morning, Andra," he simply extended his arm, saying: "There's the psaums."

"No, no, Andra," I replied; "we are all too glad to see you back again."

"Aweel," he said, still holding the list out to me, "there's only twa psaums and a paraphrase, and," he added doubtfully, "ye—ye'll maybe manage to get through!"

The auld kirk bell of Ettrick seemed suddenly to jangle out of tune as I slipped

quietly to my pew in a thoroughly meek and chastened spirit.

The introduction of hymns was a sore trial to Andra ; but the present of a fine American organ by a native of Ettrick now exiled in London brought his reign to a close altogether. To-day the well-worn "dask" is empty, and Andra's grand voice is silent.

### FREE CRITICISM AT CAPPERCLEUCH

One evening in August some twenty years ago, as the congregation were leaving the Cappercleuch Kirk, on the banks of St Mary's Loch, a stranger accosted Jamie Tait, one of the deacons, and a well-known "character," and said: "Who was that preaching this afternoon?"

"That was Dr Mair, wha has a grand kirk in Em'bro. It's no' often ye'll hear a sermon like that, I'm thinkin'."

"And who was that who led the singing," the stranger asked further.

"Oh, *him*; he's a musitioner frae Em'bro, wha precents for huz when here on his holidays. He disna dae sae bad — whiles!" — and then, with a well-known shrug of the shoulders, he added, "At onyrate, it's possible we micht hae waur!"

### AN ISLAND PRECENTOR

It is a far cry from Ettrick to Unst, the most northern island of the Shetland archipelago. Some years ago I was on holiday there for two or three weeks, and had the pleasure and privilege of

becoming acquainted with many of the people and all the ministers of the district. One Sunday evening I was sitting in the back pew of Hillside Free Church when the beadle came along the passage, and in a loud whisper told me that I was "wanted in the vastry." I said something about coming "at the close of the service"; but the messenger was obdurate: "Ye're wanted the noo." There was nothing for it but just to follow "Jeems" down the church, under the eyes of the whole congregation, with as much dignity as one could summon to his aid on such short notice—and with the consciousness that a light-coloured Norfolk suit was not the most clerical attire even in Unst.

In the vestry I found the minister and two of the elders, also "Geordie,"

the precentor, who stood beaming upon the party, and clasping tightly to his closely buttoned pilot jacket a well-worn psalm-book. Without a moment's delay the minister began as follows : —

" I am sure it would give you life-long gratification to be able to say that you had led the praise in the most northern church in the British dominions ; will you, therefore, sing for us to-night ? "

" But what will Geordie say ? " I ventured to remark, turning to that worthy official as he beamed on all around.

" It is Geordie's strong desire that you should do so," was the reply.

" Ay, deed is't," said our friend ; " for, ye see, I never get a day aff ava, an' never hear a strange v'ice."

There was nothing for it but to comply, for what is the use of trying to explain

that even a singing master sometimes needs a rest ?

At the close of the service we were all mutually pleased, for a slight novelty is welcome where routine is unbroken. Geordie was noble and generous throughout.

"Oh, you'll do as much for me some day," I said in answer to his thanks.

"An' that I wull ; the first time I'm in Scotland I'll gie ye a day ! "

I have been told that Geordie always means what he says, and keeps his word.

### THE SHORT-SIGHTED PRECENTOR

*(A Reprehensible Trick)*

The following narrative, by Jean L. Watson, is attributed to Rev. Wm. Tasker, for a long time the minister of

West Port Territorial Church, Edinburgh.

"The following incident may serve to show you how we annoyed poor Angus, though I must say the credit, or rather the discredit, of the suggestion is due to a lame tailor in the town, a half-infidel, clever fellow, named Sandy Dalgleish. We knew that the minister always gave Angus on Friday evenings a note of the psalms to be sung the next Sabbath. After careful watching, we one time discovered that part of the 103rd was to be sung on the Sabbath following. We then endeavoured to get hold of the old psalm-book used on these occasions, and after some manœuvring unfortunately succeeded. This secured, we proceeded to paste over the first four lines of that psalm four lines of the ballad of 'Chevy

Chase,' which we cut from an old song-book of the same type and colour. I wish I could describe the astonishment of the minister and congregation that day when the psalm was given out, and Angus, never dreaming of mischief, instead of reading out and then singing afterwards :

"'O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord,' etc.,

drawled out in his usual slow manner :

"'God prosper long our noble king,
Our lives and safeties all.'

Before he got to the end he seemed rather surprised that none of the people were following him, so he looked up, and, seeing amazement pictured on each face, he exclaimed : 'Fat's wrang wi' the folk, they're no singing nane the day?' and then began again :

"'A woful hunting——

Yes, it's "hunting." H-u-n-t-i-n-g,' spelling it aloud.

"'A woful hunting once there did
In Chevy Chase befall.'

"By this time the young people were in uncontrollable fits of laughter, while the old grey heads turned over their Bibles in bewilderment, and began rubbing up their spectacles to see if they could not get any more light on the mystery. Angus himself shut the book in despair, saying: 'The very teevil his ainsell's intilt. I ha'e been a precentor for thirty years, an' never heard afore that King Tavit was at Chevy Chase.'

"The minister, suspecting that some trick had been played the good man, quietly handed him another psalm-book, and after a little time something like order

was restored. Angus, though a good deal flustered, by the help of his friend in the pulpit, resumed the singing; but I fear, to many of the hearers, the devotions of that day were spoiled.

"Of course a few of us were suspected to be the guilty ones, but, as we kept our own counsel, the crime could not be proved, and so we escaped censure."

# PART IV

# Wit and Humour in Pulpit and Desk

## THE DESK AND THE GOWN

To many people, especially young people in Scotland, the precentor's pulpit-desk, or "dask" as it was called in country districts, is quite unknown. Even the minister's pulpit is rapidly being demolished, and an elevated platform is taking its place.

The desk was very small and narrow, and clung like a limpet to the main pulpit ; a tall man often could not stand upright in it because of the minister's book-board projecting overhead.

This often allowed of whispered communications between preacher and singer. Thus, when a bad cold was troubling the precentor, and he had to sit down before the somewhat long piece of the psalm that had been given out was done—"John, my man, hoo d'ye expect to sing through a' eternity when ye mak' sic a wark aboot singing a wheen extra verses o' a psalm?"

"James," said a worthy of the homely type to his precentor, who was struggling amid the shoals and quicksands of a minor tune one Sunday morning, "James, what ails ye?" "Oh, sir, A'm sair troubled wi' a wee bit kitlin' i' ma throat this mornin'." "Kitlin, did ye say? It sounds mair like a' auld full-grown cat."

" Tammas, my man, the words that King Dauvid's askin' ye to sing say you are to ' shout for joyfulness,' but instead o' that ye're giein' us a screed o' the Lamentations o' Jeremiah."

The minister did not always score, however, in these unconventional communications between pulpit and " desk." A recent incident happened in a church in the north where they have no instrumental aid in the Psalmody, and where, owing to the scarcity of precentors, the praise is still led by an old man, long past his prime. This worthy is still an autocrat, however, and, amongst other things, insists upon having the hymns and psalms to be sung on the Sunday sent to him on the previous Thursday night.

One day the minister said to the

congregation: "Let us sing Hymn No. 350."

The occupant of the desk at once got on his feet, and, turning his back to the people, looked up at the minister, and said, in a voice heard by all: "We'll dae nae sic a thing. We'll sing the 37th hymn, as ye promised on Thursday nicht."

"No, no, James; Hymn 350."

"But I'm telling ye, sir, it's the 37th hymn, and nae ither."

The discussion was continued for some time, until finally the minister addressed the congregation: "I beg your pardon, I find that I should have said the 37th Hymn!"

The strange thing about it was that the people did not seem to see anything incongruous about the incident, but sat out the controversy quite solemnly.

The precentor often wore a gown, invariably an old one; for the gown seldom belonged to the man, but only to his office, and the threadbare garment had to serve two or three generations of officials.

At the examination of candidates for the precentorship of a country church, the former officer gave a little variety to the proceedings by entering the vestry and demanding his "goun" from the committee. He strengthened his demand by saying that it was his "faither's"—who really had been the precentor once—and that he had only got the loan of it.

The matter was not settled in my presence at the time, nor for many a day after; the Session's plea being that the gown had been given to the office, and not to the man. Eventually, how-

ever, they could not well answer the argument of the claimant: "When oor last minister left, did he no' tak' his goun wi' him?" And so, to avoid the gossip of the parish, the gown was given up.

When the gown began to be thrown off people were not sure if they should not look upon the act as a serious innovation!

Mr J. Millar Craig, the well-known teacher of music, told me that when he became precentor of Greenside Parish Church, Edinburgh, he found that he was expected to wear a gown. After doing so once or twice, he discarded it. No one took any notice of this, until one Sunday Dr Glover, the minister, accosted him in the vestry with the remark: "I see you are not wearing the gown, Mr Craig."

"No, Doctor, I don't like it."

"But," said the Doctor, "if it is worn, we'll soon get you another."

"Oh!" replied Mr Craig, "it is not for that reason—besides, the beadle says it is 'spleet new.'"

"Well," said the Doctor, with a humorous smile, and eyeing certain palpable rents in the discarded vestment, "it may be 'split,' but it certainly is not new!'

The primitive life in many districts of Scotland led to much freedom and plainness of speech amongst all classes, and not least amongst minister and people. Thus—"I see I hae forgotten my sermon; and ye micht jist wrastle awa' wi' the 119th Psalm till I rin ower to the manse and see if I can find it."

There is something quaint in the following triple reproof:—

"Tammas Scott, if ye're awake ye micht wauken the beadle, and tell him to wake up the precentor."

"My freens," said a worthy minister in the north to his people, solemnly assembled to decide upon a new list of psalm tunes to be used on Sundays in church, "my freens, you may fix on ony tune you like. E'en sing 'Doun the burn, Davy, lad'—and 'I will follow thee.'"

A liberal treatment, very different from that expressed by the good old woman in similar circumstances—"Awa wi' your fal-de-rals! I've sung naething but the Psaums o' Dauvid to the tunes o' Dauvid a' my days, and I'm no gaun to change noo."

## INNOVATIONS

The making of mountains out of mole-hills is a process some people might patent. I remember seeing a precentor, who was a bit in advance of his time, appear in the desk with a pitch-pipe, and give the key-note by its aid. This pipe is an ingeniously contrived little brass tube, so regulated that it gives forth a sort of toy-trumpet sound when blown by the mouth. The amazement in the congregation was something to remember when the "twa-a-a-ng" of the pipe ran through the church, and the visible wrath of the venerable elders who sat in the Session seat boded ill for the tenant of the desk.

At the close of the service the rash innovator was handled tightly, and

commanded to "blaw the thing again in oor kirk" at his peril.

The precentor I speak of was really a good singer, else it would have gone hard with him shortly after this, when he was seen to be taking his key-note from a tuning-fork with a sliding bar that rested at the place marked for each key.

"We'll hae Maggie Lauder next," said one incensed individual—a remark just about as relevant to the action as many an objection to a similar innovation has been.

"Pitch" forks have always been stumbling-blocks to the unwary. "Tammas," said the Auld Kirk precentor in a village in the south to the carrier who acted as messenger for the valley, "Tammas, I wish ye'd ca' at the

ironmonger's when ye gang to the toun, and bring me a new pitchfork for Sunday."

The carrier duly took note of the commission, and the next Sunday, as the folk were gathering in the kirkyard previous to the service, he was seen coming hastily up the loaning with a six-foot-shanked pitchfork over his shoulder, and muttering something about "breakin' the Sawbath for this new-fangled nonsense!"

That old woman must have been related to the carrier who, when first she saw a stranger in the desk use a tuning-fork, exclaimed: "Ye villain, wud ye use cauld steel in oor kirk!"

Another precentor, however, one day took it into his head to venture on the hazardous experiment of trying a new tune.

"Whatna tune was that ye had the day?" inquired one of the elders after the service.

"Oh, yon was St Paul's," replied the precentor.

"Saint wha?"

"St Paul's."

"Ye may be very thankfu, my mannie," responded the elder, "that Paul himsel' wasna in the kirk to hear ye, for if he had, he would ha'e bundled ye oot o' the dask gey quick. Paul was a man that couldna, and, what's mair, he wadna, stand the like o' yon. Dinna affront his memory by singing a tune like that again!"

As I have already indicated, the "reading of the line" was a frequent cause of irritation to the more cultured in the congregation. Yet their irrita-

tion was nothing in comparison to that of those who objected to its discontinuance.

John Wilson himself, when obliging a clerical friend with whom he was staying in Old Kilpatrick by taking the desk on the Sunday, brought down the displeasure of the orthodox upon his head by omitting to read the line.

At the close of the forenoon service he was accosted by one of the elders:

"Sir, are ye gaun up yonder in the afternoon?"

"Yes; I intend so."

"Then, sir, ye maun read the line. Nane o' your Edinburgh tricks here!"

More characteristic, if not more emphatic, was the old woman, of whom Dr Chalmers used to speak, who was opposed to the abolition of the reading of the line on Scriptural grounds.

Being asked to give chapter and verse, she at once replied: "What says Isaiah, Doctor?—'Line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little."

No one could enjoy this quaint exegesis more thoroughly than the wise and tolerant Dr Chalmers.

Some years before the Disruption Dr Chalmers was in the habit of preaching occasionally to a small gathering of people in the village of Water of Leith, in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, the place of meeting being a storeroom in a tannery. The doctor was greatly pleased with his precentor on these occasions, and although, as is pretty well known, he knew even less about music than the precentor himself. Tammas was a stalwart anti-Burgher and had learned his style there, and Dr Chalmers never

failed to compliment the old man at the close of the service on his admirable singing, which, he told him, he enjoyed so much the more because he never heard anything like it in these modern days.

One night Tammas modestly disclaimed the usual compliment, because he had "gaed aff the tune."

"Nonsense," said Dr Chalmers. "You sung as well as ever I heard you."

"Ah, but it's true, Doctor, I gaed aff the tune a-the-gither. I began with the 'Irish' and I lost it in the second line—but I catched the 'French' in the third line doctor!"

"Well done, Tammas," said the doctor, clapping him on the back, "you should have been at Waterloo!"

### THE BAND

When the Edinburgh Musical Society ventured to introduce some of the choral works of one "Mr Handel" into its programmes, the directors said that they would have "a proper band for the choruses." "Choir" or "Chorus" is the name given to such singers nowadays; but for the last hundred and fifty years the "band," with all sorts of accents upon the vowel, has been the familiar name for any united number of chorus or part-singers in Scotland.

In provincial and rural churches the precentor reigned supreme, and bands were looked upon as amongst those mysterious and dangerous things that are supposed to lurk about big towns. Even the educated classes did not

unanimously welcome the improvement in psalmody effected by the "bands."

The Earl of Haddington was at the Assembly Service in St Giles' on one occasion—St Giles' was the first church in Edinburgh where a choir was introduced—and when the psalm was given out, and no voices sang it but those of the choir, he turned round angrily to a minister who was sitting behind, and said: "I came here to praise my Maker, and not to hear a concert."

Choirs, or "bands" as they were called, have certainly done splendid work for churches without fee or reward, and it will lead to a serious state of affairs should the advent of the organ give church managers the impression that they can now afford to slight the band. When the "passing of the band" comes

to be written it will be found that, as in the desk, there has been many a humorous incident within the choir seat. Meantime we shall keep to the precentor, simply lifting the choir veil a little in passing by, recalling the mysterious remark of a country choirmaster: "Oh ay, we've great satisfaction wi' oor band till it comes the time o' the spring bannets!"

The dwindling of the band in some places is well expressed by the Aberdeen precentor. He was wont to say: "Fan I cam' to Alford first the seat was fu roon an' roon; but nooadays ye can hardly get onybody tae help ye."

Choirs were of slow growth, and the evolution of Dr Lindsay Alexander's is not without interest.

"The attention given to psalmody had for many years been a special feature in

the congregational worship in the old Argyle Square Chapel. The leaders in that part of the service—or precentors as they are called in Scotland—were notable men. When Dr Alexander began his ministry, 'Old Bouverie,' as he was called, occupied the 'latern,' or precentor's desk.

"Under his leadership the congregation sang the old standard Scottish tunes in a rough but hearty way.

"By and by, the younger part of the congregation began to desire some improvement. Mr John Stewart, son of a worthy deacon, and Mr James Geikie, a brother of another respected office-bearer, and afterwards the father of two eminent geologists of that name, were the leading hands.

"They and others got up into the deacon's seat beside 'Old Bouverie,' and

formed a choir, or a 'band,' as it was called in those days, and which was then regarded as an innovation almost as dangerous as the organ came to be regarded in later times. . . . The superior musical attainments of Mr Geikie soon told upon those associated with him, and through them, upon the congregation. . . . "Indeed, it ultimately reached the distinction of being the best sung congregation in Edinburgh."[1]

Afterwards, when an organ was introduced into Dr Alexander's church, great fears were expressed lest the fine singing should be spoiled, and the biographer proceeds, page 197: "And so, it must be

[1] Remarks upon psalmody, precentors, bands and organs, extracted from the *Life of Dr Lindsay Alexander, Minister of Augustine Congregational Church, Edinburgh,*" pp. 194–195.

confessed, it proved. The result seemed to confirm the belief of many who have given attention to the subject, that when the conduct of praise without an instrument is already excellent, the singing being with voice, heart, and understanding, the introduction of an organ, however lawful, is of more than doubtful expediency; where it has been otherwise, the case may be different."

Just another word about the choir. We have heard the following incident quoted as a clever and faithful rebuke administered to his choir by a preacher when they had introduced a new tune into the services:—"The choir having just sung to their own praise and glory, let us now sing to the praise and glory of God in the 65th Psalm." Which he forthwith led off to a familiar tune.

We fail to see where the point of the rebuke lies. To speak thus about voluntary workers where no one could, or was at all likely to retort, was neither clever nor faithful; on the contrary, we consider it splenetic and ungentlemanly.

The late Rev. Dr Charles J. Brown was wont to say, in a very different spirit from that of the foregoing divine: "Yes, the old tunes are good, very good; but —they are not inspired to the exclusion of other Psalters."

Sympathy and a keen sense of humour often save the situation in church as in other matters.

The late Rev. William Jamieson, when minister of the Tron Church, Edinburgh, used to tell that in his first charge in Fife he found the singing very bad. Still, he did not despair; and by attend-

ing the practices, and even helping the precentor to get some training in voice production and the theory of music, he had the satisfaction of having the Church praise greatly improved.

Those who remember Mr Jamieson don't require to be told that he was a most attractive and eloquent preacher. One beautiful day in summer his church was crowded to the door by a most attentive audience, which certainly was a gratifying sight in view of what had been the case previously.

Expressing to his precentor at the close of the service his satisfaction at having had such a large congregation, the latter modestly remarked: "Aweel, ye see, sir, it's nae wonder, for folk a' ken guid singing when they hear't!"

Another very characteristic story comes

from the south, regarding a precentor who really was a very good singer. After morning service one Sunday, the minister being pleased with himself as well as with the singing, said to the precentor: "John, that singing was really very good. How was it that you attained such proficiency?"

"Well, sir," said John, taking the compliment quite seriously, "as we are speakin' confidential-like atween oorsels, I may tell ye that it took me the best pairt o' twenty years before I reached perfection!"

Of a different type was the precentor of an earlier day who, being rather weak on the Roman numerals, glanced at the 43rd Psalm first one way and then another and finally made the intimation: "We are to begin the service by singing

the X and the L and the three e'ed Psalm."

The danger of seeking for compliments is aptly shown by a conversation between a worthy minister of a provincial town in the south of Scotland and a stranger whom he met in the kirk loan just after service one Sunday.

"Good-morning. I think I have had the pleasure of seeing you twice or thrice in our church lately."

"Quite right, sir, quite right."

"You are a stranger?"

"Ay; I live five miles frae the town."

"Indeed; then I trust your visit is to your edification."

"You're richt, sir; you're richt. Div ye ken, your baand is the best i' the county, and I wad stand ony kind o' preachin' just to hear your singing!"

### AMATEUR PRECENTORS

For some years after the Disruption many of the Free churches had the praise led by amateur precentors. This brought about some amusing impressions and misapprehensions. For example, we know of one instance where the precentor for the time being was an eminent legal gentleman in the city of Edinburgh. An acquaintance of his of equal social position had left the country several years previous to this. On his return he was speaking of the changes that had taken place during the interval. "For instance," said he, "when I left town A. H. was an eminent Writer to the Signet, and now he is a precentor in New North Church!"

There were some good amateur pre-

centors and some woefully bad ones, although, as an old lady was heard to remark of one of the latter class: "He worked gey hard, puir man, for a' he got."

The amateur precentor, like the genuine article, was exposed to the comments and criticisms of "gentle and semple," without much regard being paid to his feelings. But he had his compensation in the admiration with which he was viewed by his immediate friends.

"Can ye tell me, sir, who is to preach to-day?" asked a stranger of a man standing at a church door in Edinburgh.

"Preach, did ye say? I dinna ken wha's to preach; but my son's to precent. Gang in, sir, gang in!"

An amateur precentor, who had rather

a limited number of tunes, got into a difficulty one morning when a stranger who was occupying the pulpit gave out the 148th Psalm, second version :

> "The Lord of heav'n confess,
> On high his glory raise," etc.

Nothing daunted, the precentor boldly attacked the peculiar metre with a long-measure tune. Making little progress, he stopped, and looking up to the minister exclaimed in indignant tones: "If ye're gaun to gi'e oot psalms o' that kind, ye maun sing them yersel. Gie's the 'Auld Hunder.'"

Many years ago a great flood in the Tweed carried away the bridge at Kelso. On Sunday morning the minister of the Parish kirk was at a loss what to do without the precentor, who lived across the river at Maxwellheugh, and who was,

therefore, unable to attend to duty that day.

Stating his difficulty to the congregation, the minister was gratified to see a man rise up and make his way to the precentor's desk. The psalm was duly given out, the tune was started, but the would-be precentor fell through at the second line. Nothing daunted, he tried again, but again broke down, when the minister leant over the pulpit and said: "Sit down, James." Still certain of his ability to do better, James once more tackled the tune and was apparently to illustrate the truth of the remark that "the third time's lucky," when he received a rousing crack on the ear from the now incensed minister, which caused him to resume his seat and give up precenting as something not in his line.

Perhaps the most striking trio of amateurs ever brought before the public was that suggested by Dr M'Knight, who was clerk to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland more than a century ago. The business before the House was the appointment of a committee to improve the psalmody of the Church, when the worthy clerk, who was wont to enliven a dull sederunt by a joke, solemnly suggested the addition of the following names to those already proposed:—"Mr *Singer* of Humbie, Mr *Sangster* of Fala, and Mr *Pyper* of Pencaitland."

Quite recently there died a notable Border town worthy who in his young days became a member of the Free Church at the Disruption. He occupied the "desk" for a number of years, but

by and by did not please the congregation. His services were gratuitous, and it was a delicate matter to dislodge him. As the minister remarked : " It's an unco maitter to fash wi' them that tak' pairt in the services o' the Sanctuary." Several suggestions were made, and at last the idea was hit upon that, by giving him a small but inappropriate present, he might take the hint that his services were no longer desired. A soiree was arranged, and the presentation of a silver snuff-box was made to him, when in reply, greatly to the annoyance and discomfiture of his enemies, he expressed his delight at this signal proof of their appreciation of his singing, adding : " As I've done so well in the past I hope to give greater satisfaction in time to come ! "

PART V

# The Power of Psalmody

It is impossible to properly appreciate or even to understand the tenacity with which the Scots cling to simple psalmody unless we remember that, by long pondering over "The Book," their thoughts unconsciously find expression in the language of Scripture, which has enriched and made picturesque their vernacular; and, further, that to all classes amongst them many of the psalms are veritable tide-marks of national or personal experience.

The Reformation watchword in the 46th; the Covenanter's hope in the

76th; the victor's shout in the 124th; the contrition of the 51st; and the child-like faith of the 23rd, have endeared these psalms to every Scottish heart.

Yes; the precentor passeth; but that the psalms may never pass from the churches should be the fervent wish of every lover of our land.

And yet how strange it is to find in recent years that in many churches hymns have supplanted the psalms, so that, out of five singings, only *one* psalm is used at each service, and frequently not even one.

I am well aware of what is said about the variety of themes for praise that is to be found in hymnology—the Person and Work of Christ, the Work of the Holy Spirit, the Christian Life—Missions, and the Church and the Young—are

themes of the first importance. But it is generally found that the minister who knows the place and power of such hymns in the Church service is the first to acknowledge the singularly devotional, subjective and doxological character of that Hebrew Psalter which has been the medium of praise for so many generations in the Scottish Presbyterian Church.

In this connection it is a grief to many to find that the children in so many of our churches are to-day growing up in ignorance of "those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide," and scarcely know the worship-music of their fathers, nor even the names or the tender strains of "Martyrdom," "Coleshill," "Balerma," "Selma," or "Kilmarnock," with all their hallowed associations.

Burns, who knew well what was

dearest to us, and who knew music a great deal better than is commonly supposed, has left not only a beautiful, but what we are assured is a true picture of the habits of the cottar of his day:

They chant their artless notes in simple guise;
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim.
Perhaps "Dundee's" wild warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive "Martyrs," worthy of the name,
Or noble "Elgin" beets the heavenward flame,
The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays:
Compared with these, Italian trills are tame:
The tickl'd ears no heartfelt raptures raise;
Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise.

Psalmody was not merely a musical act, it was deeper than that; and, besides, there was a singular affinity between the poetry of the psalms and the thought and national experiences of the people of our land; so that the picturesque imagery and love for the open displayed in Hebrew

poetry, found a quick reception, and a natural home, in the heart of the freedom-loving Scot.

### THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH

After many storms in the social as well as in the ecclesiastical world, for weal or woe the organ is now securely anchored in the Scottish Church. A new medium has been introduced to our service, but care must be taken that the instrument does not supplant, but simply aids, the human voice.

It is sometimes asked incredulously, by those who have been "born to the organ,": "Can a vast audience sing in time and tune without the aid of an instrument?" Well, Scottish Church history has many notable examples of such singing; but without recalling these

instances, the present writer may be allowed to mention some recent historic occasions, when the singing, in correct time and tune by large audiences, of simple psalmody, made an impression never to be forgotten.

For instance, the praise at the Jubilee Meetings of the Free Church in 1893; the praise at all the Union Meetings of the Free and the United Presbyterian Church, and especially at the Waverley Market meeting in 1900; the praise at the great "Convocation" in the Synod Hall, and the Waverley Market in 1904; and the singing at the historic devotional meeting on the War of the three General Assemblies held in the U.F. Assembly Hall so recently as May, 1915. All of which the present writer had the honour of leading, without any instrumental

aid, save that of—as William Carnie was wont to say—"a small pocket tuning-fork."

In spite of our admiration for Dr Andrew Carnegie's munificence, we sometimes wish he had inquired more carefully as to the adequate capacity of the building for the handsome organ presented, and whether the people were able to maintain it in proper condition, and have it properly played after they got it.

Congregations in too many instances have literally found that "their reach was farther than their grasp," and, by a spirit of ostentation and rivalry, have lost the benefit of a medium which by judicious forethought might have proved a real aid to devotion.

An instrument fit for a cathedral placed in a small church is a violation of

the laws both of taste and of acoustics. Church praise, after all, is a spiritual act ; and where its accessories offend the æsthetic sense, so far is it weakened, and its devotional influence vitiated.

But, so far as our theme is concerned, the whole matter may be summed up in a sentence : " The old order changeth, giving place to the new " ; and, save in a few country places, the Scottish precentor as we and our fathers knew him is gone for ever.

It may be said : Surely not gone for ever when one thinks of the people who, for various reasons, have recently left organ-using churches. Well, recrudescence is not renascence, and the younger generation, even in the far north, have long since, in school and elsewhere, come under the spell of the musical forward

movement, so that the precentor is no longer to them the official he was to their fathers.

True, he is still heard in the highest of our Church courts, and strangers from distant lands greet him as one of the few things distinctively Scottish—as they understood it—that yet remain in our midst. But he is passing there too, and in a short time his chair will be vacant, and men will look in vain for any vestige of his office.

So time speeds on, and forms and forces which seemed likely to last as long as our nation cherished its traditions are discarded and neglected; and even, while we marvel, they are "a' wede away."

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